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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7619
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA IMMEDIATE 0155
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE 0587
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL//CINC/POLAD// IMMEDIATE
RUEAHND/CDRJTFB SOTO CANO HO IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
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RHMFISI/DIRJIATF SOUTH IMMEDIATE
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J5 MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE 0726
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/THE WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000107

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL PTER SMIG CVIS VE HO

SUBJECT: NEW HONDURAN FM EDMUNDO ORELLANA: WE CAN WORK WITH THIS GUY!

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 89

Classified By: Ambassador Charles Ford, reason 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On his first day in office, Foreign Minister Edmundo "Mundo" Orellana received the Ambassador for a courtesy call. They discussed moving the bilateral agenda forward, especially in the areas of security and migration issues. Orellana lamented the chaos the Foreign Ministry was in, and pledged to remove the political activists in his ministry and the "ghost" diplomats in the United States who never show up to work. He expressed complete surprise to learn Vice FM Reina had made pronouncements on the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC - see reftel), and the Ministry had sent a dipnote supporting those statements. In short, he was open, admitted when he did not know something, and expressed an earnest desire to build on a relationship that had been neglected by his predecessor. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On February 1, the Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Foreign Minister Edmundo "Mundo" Orellana --his first day in office. Orellana said he was honored to receive the Ambassador on his first day and hoped that the Ambassador would feel free to come to him at any time. The Ambassador told Orellana he wanted to continue to build on the U.S.-Honduran relationship by addressing issues of bilateral concern, and mentioned our August 2007 letter to President Manuel Zelaya that proposed seven points of possible discussion. Orellana denied any knowledge of this agenda, which the Ambassador offered to send to him. The Ambassador solicited any additional issues Orellana might want to discuss, and Orellana immediately suggested the status of migrants should be added to the list. Orellana then asked about some general issues, including Petrocaribe and Zelaya's trip to Washington February 7, saying he was not even sure if he would be accompanying Zelaya. Orellana promised to re-start the bilateral discussions as soon as he could form his team of advisors.

¶3. (C) Orellana then told the Ambassador that when he left the Ministry of Governance, he held a reception for the

incoming Minister and introduced him to the staff and briefed him on the most important outstanding issues. He said that he arrived at the MFA today to no welcome at all -- he does not even know what his new telephone number is. Orellana characterized the MFA as "chaotic" and said he was going to get rid of the estimated 500 political activists who were brought in under previous FM Milton Jimenez. He said Jimenez completely politicized the Ministry and rewarded political activists with no qualifications or experience with Ministry positions. Orellana was surprised to learn from the Ambassador that there were multiple Honduran diplomats in the United States who had requested and received diplomatic visas, but who had never shown up for work. He asked for further information on these cases and pledged not only to get rid of them, but also to right-size staff in all the overseas missions because it was a huge drain on their hard currency reserves.

¶4. (C) Orellana also seemed genuinely surprised to hear that Vice FM Reina had made "wishy-washy" pronouncements on the FARC that left it open to interpretation that the GOH did not consider the FARC to be terrorists, and even more surprised that the MFA had followed it up with a diplomatic note confirming this position. The Ambassador told Orellana that, in contrast, the Chief of Defense had issued a letter saying that the Honduran Armed Forces work from the U.S. terrorist list (which contains the FARC). The Ambassador explained to Orellana that most of our bilateral military cooperation is in the counterterrorism (CT) field, and that much of the CT work was combating the influence of the FARC in Central America. The Ambassador said he had discussed this issue with Zelaya, who had told him that personally he considered

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the FARC terrorists, but that he "could not say that publicly." Orellana thanked the Ambassador for this insight, because he said that if he had been asked, he had been planning to say, "Of course the FARC are terrorists." He promised to consult with the CHOD, the Minister of Security, and the President and get back to us on this issue.

¶5. (C) Comment: In short, Orellana struck us as an open and honest interlocutor, who admitted when he did not know something and who honestly wants to work to improve the bilateral relationship. He told us that when Zelaya asked him to take on the position, he had told the President he did not think he was the best person for the job, as he knew nothing about diplomacy and does not speak other languages. (Bio note: He told us he spent three years learning Italian, and his time in New York studying English, but that he lost all foreign language skills for lack of use.) Orellana seemed to be "out of the loop" on many very big issues like Petrocaribe, the FARC, and his own President's trip to Washington next week; however, with time, we think he can use his relationship with the President (they are related and grew up living next door to each other) to gain more influence. We look forward to working with Orellana and think he may indeed be one of the "islands of sanity" that we can go to when working with this administration. End comment.

FORD